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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Promoting a geographical names programme

Submitted by Australia**

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1. The following nine points are of interest in promoting and obtaining funding for a national names authority.

1. Identifying and using political sources

2. Politicians usually represent local areas and look after local interests in order to maintain their popularity. Names are often emotive issues and identity is important to people. When a local government sought to change a suburban name in Perth some years ago some 1,500 people turned out in a public meeting to protest. The local politician enthusiastically embraced the cause, recognizing the public interest. This interest on the part of politicians should be greatly encouraged.

3. Some years ago the Committee was contacted by a state politician with an interest in indigenous names. We promptly undertook to keep him informed of any developments in this area and sought his support in larger areas. Such interest and support has been shown to be mutually beneficial.

4. Another politician is a keen local historian, and we have supplied information from files and maps, which he has keenly accepted. Again the support is worth while, even as long-term insurance.

2. Cultural and heritage programmes

5. Cultural and heritage programmes are important sources of funds, and they are worth cultivating. Geographical names are just as important an aspect of heritage as, for instance, buildings, often out-surviving any building, and this aspect should be made clear to relevant authorities. Research into names is costly and time consuming, and heritage programmes are one source of funds that can support such research.

6. Original names from Aboriginal peoples are often the most significant ethnic identifier of the people of a country (e.g. American Indian names, Australian Aboriginal names), and there is a pride in such names that will support their preservation and enable funds to be made available.

3. Mapping programmes

7. Most geographical names authorities have a close association with a mapping authority, and it is important to identify aspects of mapping programmes utilizing geographical names and to endeavour to associate these closely with the names authority. In our own organization there is a strong link, the names staff supplying names for maps, editing maps and text and assisting with the compilation of a road directory. Staff have been made available to the Committee because of these programmes, and it is a bonus that they are available for names work also.

4. Government employment projects

8. From time to time some Governments allocate funds to projects developed to reduce unemployment. Usually of a limited life, and designed to be labour-intensive with minimal capital costs, such projects represent ideal opportunities for names authorities. A typical project would be data input to a gazetteer, where there is a large volume of names to be entered. It is useful to be prepared for such occasions, although admittedly they are a rarity.

5. Using publicity to advantage

9. This is probably the most important of the nine points made in this paper and the one through which the most impact can be achieved. Excellent success has been achieved in this area, and while more could have been done had there been more time, any time spent is beneficial. There is great human interest in geographical names, and contacts with newspaper and magazine writers should be sought out and cultivated. Even if articles are not complimentary, they draw attention to the matter and are still valuable.

10. In a local newspaper a columnist writes humorous anecdotes, and from time to time information on names is given to him. A television weatherman has a keen interest in names and is supplied information that enables him to add extra points of interest when describing the weather in a region.

11. The value of a good names controversy should not be underestimated also. Contentious issues, such as replacing a prominent name with an earlier indigenous one, while difficult to resolve, are very valuable in drawing attention to the value of a names authority. There was one names authority chairman who actually encouraged a controversial naming matter because he recognized the value of the publicity.

6. Education

12. Staff in names authorities should be prepared to spread the message regarding names programmes: educating the public about the value of such programmes can contribute greatly to ensuring that the work continues or is enhanced. As the Committee's Secretary, I speak on a regular basis to school and community groups about the "heritage of Western Australian place-names", and there is a keen interest in these talks and a lot of feedback. It is worth while spending time in preparing information and developing one's skills at public speaking. It is not a daunting task when the speaker is familiar with his subject, and this is often the case with names authority staff.

7. Land information databases

13. With the rapid growth of databases in recent years it is critical that names authorities work to ensure that the geographical names part of the databases are kept within their control, and in fact become an essential part of the database. The key is to make sure that other government agencies will come to rely on the names authority to supply up to date names information and to be prepared for new initiatives in this field. The difficulty will be to keep up with new developments; but the value of doing so should not be underestimated.

14. If your names database is good and reliable, promote it widely, if it's not, bring it up to scratch as soon as possible; or be left behind.

8. Military requirements

15. The military require accurate names information for their mapping requirements, probably more than any other organization. A good relationship with them is essential and they can be used to keep pressure on Government to ensure that names programmes are supported. They often have their own programmes which may or may not link up with the names authorities, and if not, this should be worked on.

16. It is also important to identify key personnel in the military, and keep them informed of names activities in order to develop good understanding and obtain their support.

9. Language programmes

17. Language is a vital part of the culture of a country, and place-names are identified as a significant component of cultural identity. Every effort should be made to promote place-names as an aspect of language and to target funds made available for language programmes. Such programmes are usually based in academic institutions, and while funds may not be directly available to a names authority, research projects can be promoted that indirectly benefit the authority. There are many such projects available suitable for master's or doctorate courses, and it is very valuable to establish strong relationships with relevant academic institutions.

Summary

18. In the foregoing notes, some nine areas of significance in promoting a names programme are identified, but there is one ingredient of far greater importance: enthusiasm. It is only when relevant staff are totally committed to a programme and can enthusiastically sell it to all and sundry, that support can be obtained from whatever source. Support may well come from an area distinct from those noted, but it will be there if the programme is successfully sold. Be prepared to go out on a limb, take risks and attempt the impossible because you believe in what you are doing.
